

Kevin Diaz, Jeremy Herb, *Star Tribune*

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WASHINGTON - Members of the U.S. House on Tuesday took 25 minutes to approve an emergency \$26 billion state stimulus package that brought them scrambling back for a rare one-day August session.

They spent much of the rest of their time spinning it to the public.

The bill, which includes \$430 million for educators and Medicaid patients in Minnesota, divided the state's eight-member House delegation sharply along party lines, with all three Republicans voting no.

President Obama signed the measure Tuesday evening after it passed the House 247-161. The bill had passed the Senate last week.

With the elections expected to turn largely on how the public views the middling economic recovery, Democrats cast the bill as a needed boost to protect an estimated 300,000 teachers, police officers and other public sector workers who might otherwise lose their jobs to local budget cuts.

Minnesota, facing a near \$6 billion deficit in the next biennium, stands to gain \$263 million in Medicaid funds and \$167 million for schools. The school money would save more than 2,300 jobs in the state.

Republicans directed most of their ire at the \$10 billion part of the aid package aimed at teachers and other public employees.

"A federal bailout is not the answer," said Minnesota Rep. John Kline, the ranking Republican on the Education and Labor Committee. "Spending another \$10 billion we do not have will not improve public education or protect the very best teachers."

Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty condemned the additional funding, and Rep. Tim Walz said that Pawlenty "indicated to us he may reject it."

Pawlenty issued a statement criticizing Tuesday's vote, but, as he has in the past, stopped short of saying the state would reject the money.

Democrats say the bill is "paid for" by closing tax loopholes and other measures, but the measure also includes a reduction in extra food stamp benefits starting in 2014.

Hoping to leverage the vote in some of the most high-profile House races in November, Democrats took particular aim at Minnesota Republican Michele Bachmann, who blasted the bill on the eve of the vote in a national tele-town hall.

Bachmann said that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is "spending your money and essentially laundering it as cash for a Democratic reelection program."

Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., said that Tuesday's bill is not about November's general election.